

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Public Health
For HJR 3

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Hearing Date: March 10, 2025 8:00 AM

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I am writing to express my strongest support for the creation of the Dementia Prevention and Research Institute and share my perspective as to why it is so critical for the citizens of the great State of Texas. We would all benefit from concentrated research efforts focused on dementia. Conditions like Alzheimer's, and other brain disorders with dementia, represent a huge challenge. Interdisciplinary and collaborative research with Texas institutions banding together to develop treatments to change the course of disease, prevent dementia, and enhance the quality of life for patients and their families would have a profound benefit for all Texans. The Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas provides a shining example of an effective model for this strategy. The time is now right for DPRIT.

I am a physician-scientist, professor at Baylor College of Medicine, and founding director of the Jan and Dan Duncan Neurological Research Institute at Texas Children's Hospital. I trained as a child neurologist, but after watching the plight of children affected by neurological disorders, I decided to pursue research to identify the causes of these diseases. I was fortunate to identify the gene for a severe form of autism, Rett syndrome; the first gene for a neurodegenerative balance disorder; a gene for bipolar; and half a dozen other genes that cause developmental or degenerative disorders. These discoveries allowed us to explore therapeutic paths and I am pleased to report that we are now performing clinical trials based on some of my discoveries.

Over the last ten years, I have embarked on studies dedicated to preventing dementia well before symptoms manifest. We know that the protein tau causes over 26 different dementias. In Alzheimer's disease, it is a major driver of dementia, mediating amyloid toxicity, so I concentrated on finding pathways to decrease tau with the goal of developing a drug that could be taken orally well before dementia starts - preventing it altogether. We discovered such pathways and are now focused on drug development. My dream is to do for the brain what has been done for the heart. Patients with high cholesterol can now take statins before they develop heart disease. Once we have drugs to lower tau, healthy people will be able to take a tau-lowering drug to prevent dementia. We are committed to accomplishing this goal.

I share this background to highlight that I have been studying brain disorders since 1985 and to underscore the power of research and collaboration for advancing therapies. It is because of my background and dedication that I humbly write to underscore the importance of DPRIT. Dementias constitute a huge burden on society in Texas, the country, and the world. Today, dementias are more disabling than heart disease or cancer. We need a multidisciplinary effort across Texas with physicians, researchers, engineers, computer scientists, and chemists all working together to find solutions.